**John Pletcher:** Yeah, we needed everything that would slow the airplane down. If we'd have had a parachute in the tail we would have probably popped that too [*laughter*]. It's a wonder they didn't figure that one out – take some condemned parachutes and rig them up in the tail cone and have them, like some of the later airplanes they had them, especially on test airplanes. A lot of the test airplanes early in the war the first ones flown out of the factory it was not uncommon at all for them to have a drogue parachute arrangement to help slow the airplane down to make sure they didn't destroy the only airplane that they had built. The drogue chute had become quite common and it was standard on some of their airplanes, I understand. But, you know you come whistling in at 135 mph and maybe you've got maybe 4000 feet of usable runway and it may be slick, it may be wet, might be icy and you could go sliding off the end of the runway and inevitably the nosewheel would collapse on you because it wasn't built to take that kind of punishment. The main gear usually would fold up pretty good. The B-17 would fair better on an occasion like that because it was a taildragger and it had a pretty good landing gear, pretty tough landing gear.

And by the way, when I was instructing in B-17s down at Alexandria, Louisiana I was on a crew, they called it the standardization board. And it was a crew of pilots, gunners and so forth that were designated to check crews that were being trained to go overseas as a combat crew. The pilots would check out the pilots and the engineer would check the engineers in these new crews and instructor gunners would check the gunners out. This standardization crew had a couple of airplanes that were assigned to it but they also flew the regular trainer airplanes down there too they would just get in with the crew and go fly.

We had no restrictions on us as pilots. We could fly in any kind of weather that we wanted to and that's where I found the very first ILS that I ever flew was at Alexandria, Louisiana. I have taken off when we had only about ¼ mile visibility and dense fog with the B-17 with a student and I'd be in the right hand seat, he'd be in the left – this would be a crew that was gonna be sent overseas as a replacement crew. We'd take off and go up and maybe fly an instrument check, on instruments – actual instruments in clouds – and come back and land using the ILS. We have landed on that ILS many times when the rest of the trainers were grounded – they weren't able to take off because visibility and so forth was too low. But the standardization board was supposed to be skilled enough and know enough, be smart enough not to go beyond their abilities, but ¼ mile seemed to be ok.

And then they found out that one of the things we had to check them on was, to demonstrate to them – we didn't actually do it but you'd coach them on making a short landing, landing and stopping as quick as possible. A B-17 could be landed and stopped in 1200 feet and I did it myself and I demonstrated it to students or they would come in normally – normal flaps – slower, as slow as they deemed possible - by trial and error they had figured out about how slow you could slow the B-17 down. And you'd put it down wheels first on the very first part of the runway and as soon as the main gear touched you'd raise the tail to get weight on the main gear. The co-pilot would dump the flaps and you'd get on the brakes and watch that you didn't nose it over because it could be nosed over. And you got the weight on the main gear where your brakes were and you get on the main gear and we didn't cut the mixtures on those. You'd ride it down and stop it in 1200 feet. That, I presume, was something that they might have had to do overseas if they had something wrong with the airplane that they couldn't let it run all the way. Or, if they

had badly wounded people on board that they wanted to get stopped off the runway, to let other people get in behind, or whatever reason they had to stop early. Or maybe somebody else had a gear collapse on the runway on rollout, and the runway was shortened by a whole lot but you could still land on part of it.

It was fun. Of, course I had an instrument card by that time [*laughing*].

**Janis Kozlowski:** What year was that?

**John Pletcher:** That would have been '44. It would have been about the fall of 1944, if I remember right. That was kind of a good assignment, except that Louisiana gets a lot of fog and we had a lot of fog down there. Don't know why they put an airbase down there. They put lots of them out in Texas because, all in all, Texas and Southern California usually had a lot better weather. But, of course, politics being what politics is that determines a lot of times where things get done, so, I suppose that's why the runway got put down there at Alexandria. They had B-26 training at Barksdale, Louisiana also, which could get a lot of fog, especially in the winter.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, you were well suited for that having come from the Aleutians [*laughter*]

**John Pletcher:** Yeah, I was accustomed to fog. [*laughter*] There wasn't much they could do to us.